

Nadler, Conyers and Towns Propose Sweeping Reform to Nation's Housing Discrimination Laws

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Chair of the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers (D-MI), and Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Edolphus Towns (D-NY) introduced the Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) Act in order to extend critical federal civil rights protections to individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, or source of income. Today, many in the LGBT community, many people paying rent with government housing vouchers, and numerous others routinely experience housing discrimination by landlords, banks, and real estate professionals.

"In 2010, LGBT people and families should not have to face housing discrimination at the hands of the unscrupulous or bigoted," said Nadler. "This legislation will provide key updates to the Fair Housing Act to ensure that the law is actually protecting ALL Americans and guaranteeing people of any sexual orientation, gender identity, marital and familial status, and source of income the right to the housing they choose."

"We can't win the fight for equal housing opportunities without the HOME Act and its greater protections against housing discrimination," Conyers said. "I am pleased to introduce this bill with my colleagues as it will further the cause of the original Fair Housing Act and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King in promoting integrated communities."

"Fair housing must be a right for all Americans," said Towns. "It is therefore necessary that it be reflected in the laws that govern our nation. I fully support the Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) Act which in effect will protect the rights of LGBT Americans as well as others who deserve equal protection under the law, regardless of their source of income. In New York City, over 101,000 families benefit from the Section 8 Choice Voucher program. This bill would protect each of those families against unfair discrimination in the rental market."

The HOME Act would amend the Fair Housing Act by prohibiting discrimination in the sale or rental of housing, the financing of housing, and in brokerage services on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, source of income, or marital status. The Act would also amend the Fair Housing Act's definition of "familial status" in order to more accurately reflect contemporary family arrangements - expanding the term to include "anyone standing in loco parentis" of one or more individuals who are not 18 years of age, thus providing non-traditional families with equal protection.

"These much-needed changes to the Fair Housing Act will improve our neighborhoods and expand important civil rights to those currently left out," said Shanna L. Smith, National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) President and CEO. "This kind of discrimination runs counter to the American spirit of opportunity, and instead is part of America's dark history of senseless exclusion. We rejected this exclusion when we passed civil rights laws in the 1960's, and have routinely updated these laws when necessary. It's necessary to do so again."

The Fair Housing Act, Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act, has protected people living in America from housing discrimination since 1968, when it passed in the immediate aftermath of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. Under the Act, it is illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, disability, or familial status. The Act also mandates that the federal government promote integrated communities.

While these measures were an important first step in the fight for equal housing opportunities, they have been thus far inadequate in keeping relevant with the times. People who are not currently protected by the Fair Housing Act regularly face open hostility in the housing market. Landlords, real estate agents, and mortgage lenders often offer housing on different and discriminatory terms to LGBT individuals. LGBT individuals also face harassment and potential violence.

Home seekers who intend to pay for housing with government assistance face similar discrimination. It is this type of inconsistency, lack of accountability, and discrimination that the HOME Act wishes to address.

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